

Sue Galliano Interview

Interviewer: Earl Robichaux

Earl Robichaux: Okay if you could state your name, when you were born, and where we are here?

Sue Galliano: Um, my name is Sue Galliano. I was born in June of 1949, and we are sitting in Grand Isle.

R: And could you tell me about the earliest days um, vacations, trips that you took to the island?

G: Um, my family moved here when I was about twelve to the South Lafourche area. And my earliest memory coming to Grand Isle was with our landlady at the time – Ms. Reneaux Jambons. And Ms. Reneaux's family had come from Cheniere and had moved up the bayou after the storm of 1893. And so when we came down the bayou – from the bayou down to Grand Isle the first time, we saw all those wonderful Cheniere oaks and um, the sides of the road had beautiful oak trees growing on there, and there were ridges, and it was beautiful. And Ms. Reneaux was a wonderful source of information because she as a child had come down here on packet boats and spent the summers that way on Grand Isle. Um, she pointed out things that we should know like for instance these were um, trees that always had birds in them. Even back then – this is back in the early sixties, she even knew the importance before it was a big deal here of you know, the natural migration of the birds coming through. Uh, we'd come to the beach, and the beach was always a fun place to go um because you always had folks from all over. And the, the biggest deal was you went – especially in the hot, hot summer, was you went speckled trout fishing and you went crabbing. And you would catch the crabs; you'd build a fire on the beach from the driftwood or whatever was on the beach. You boil them right there, eat them full of sand, but it was great. You were on Grand Isle and you were having a good time and it was worth the, worth the effort. It was a lot of fun.

R: So how would you crab and speck fish?

G: Well basically crabbing - you would um, a lot of people took two poles and put them out in the water, run a string across, tie a chicken neck to them, and you come out with the, the crabs will come up to the chicken necks and then you take a dipping net and you just dip them up, you know, dip the crabs up that way. And then you bring them back to the beach, throw them in an ice chest, throw them wherever bucket or whatever you were holding them in. then when it - toward the late afternoon when it was time to boil them, you'd go out and get you some fresh uh, salt water, put it down, boil it, and put a little crab boil in it and you had everything you needed to make a crab boil. So it was a fun day. It was a nice way to end the day with the crabs that were on there.

R: So would the chicken neck actually go to the bottom? Or just float on the side.

G: Well it depends – sometimes it depends on your water- you get out there you position it, and sometimes it was a little bit too deep, but you need them kind of - crabs tend to stay on the bottom, so you do need a way to for them to access the, the crab necks. People still do that. You know after every

season in July you – after going August, September, the little sticks will still be out there, and there are people who come in the month of July to do nothing but crab. They will come and just come crabbing.

G: Uh, would you boil them in gulf water?

R: I have. I've seen that done. I've seen it – I've seen people do that. In fact I've done that – we put them out there – because at that point there was no source of, you know, unless you went to somebody's camp, unless you knew somebody had a camp right there on the beach, you had to pretty much do that. So I mean the crabs are living in it already. It's not like you're introducing something strange to them.

R: Sure.

G: So it worked out really well.

R: So how would you speck fish?

G: Uh, I can remember speckled trout fishing, um, at the walkovers – I mean not that long ago. When they – then they start running across the beach – right as the sun's coming up, you just go out there when the sun starts coming up above the, you know, the waterline, and it's into the water at the speckled trout were out there and you just start throwing your line, and sometimes it's uh, shrimp, sometimes it's uh, shad rig just whatever –whatever it is. And you just cast right into that sunlight, and I've seen people go out and by eight o'clock in the morning, and got their whole catch for the day, you know. so it's a – it just depends – depends on where the fish are, how warm the water is, where they're at – that sort of thing.

R: Do you have any memories of what big schools of trout, you know, coming in?

G: I can remember uh, yes. I can remember the people used to – before there was a limit on how many speckled trout you can catch, Um, people would be going the beach and they would catch so many they couldn't hardly walk. You know, they'd just be – they'd have 75, 100 speckled trout – they were so plentiful back then, and there was no limit on them. And until um, I guess, Wildlife and Fisheries put a limit on them, um, people would catch – you just get – these big schools of them – just huge schools of them. So um, they were a lot of fun to catch. Great to eat. Wonderful to eat.

R: Oh yeah.

G: The best. Haha.

R: I bet. Um, in terms of big fish, it's like marlin, tarpon, that sort of thing in passes...

G: I don't think they have uh, tarpon used to be out in the pass. I've heard people talk about that a long time ago, and actually when they first started the Tarpon Rodeo I guess. Um, the tarpon were out in the pass, and they would talk about boiling in the – rolling in the surf, and it was like that. And I think just because of their habitat changing, they probably went further and further away. I don't know where they catch them now – I know they go offshore 40, 50 miles to do it. I don't even remember marlin

being a big issue around here, you know. I think Tarpons were the only real sport fishing, uh, that they had. Um...

R: What do you think brought them in so close?

G: Probably just because it was um, an area they were used to being in, you know. It was part of their habitat – part of their range. Because you go to Florida places in Florida – you go to Key West underneath the boats, you know, in the marinas you can see them down in the water, and I don't necessarily think that they're such a – they're a sport fish. I mean they're not something you eat – I don't know anybody who eats tarpon. So their habitat just I guess just – well what could they eat probably started going further and further offshore.

R: Mmhmm.

G: I don't know what they eat, but...

R: Do you think that the depth of the passes has changed over time?

G: I would say so, yes. In fact, um, in this lady, Ms. Reneaux that we um, come – came to know really well, she relates it, but she was a child that it really wasn't that the pass really wasn't that deep at low tide – you could almost walk between all of the islands – that's how close they were. Um, the maritime industry at some point needed to get in, get out, so they started dredging the pass a little bit. It silts up fairly quickly. It'll. It'll silt out. Now I think it's probably just so natural the water flow coming through there just keeps it um, ebbled out. There's probably in the center of the pass there's – I know there's gotta be 150, 200 feet of water right there. But it's a very deep, you know, quick back up to the sides like this. It's not a, um, that deep all the way across. So...

R: Um, any memories of oystering?

G: Um, and my husband's family were oyster people. And his mother has told me that when her dad was oystering, they would stay out 28 days and come in for 2 days. In the 2 days they were there they were just to sell the oysters and go right back out. The season then was so short, and it had to be done in the wintertime because they had no refrigeration. So you had oyster boats, which were big flat oyster luggers. And a lot of them, um, had a very short extended time where they could be out there and get their product into market or into New Orleans where it could be sold. So they had to stay out these really tight timeframes to get their product in. Um, and it's like any other industry, they've – it depended heavily on um, speed - getting them to the market. And the market for them was up in New Orleans, so they had to out and do it, do it, do it, you know, and harvest, harvest, harvest, and throw the shells back in, and then get it sacked up on to the city. So during their brief harvest times, they really had to work fast. And they had to – at some point in time – they had to come back and renourish the beds with the other shells so they have another crop for the next year.

R: Um, when we say back in that time, we're talking about turn of the century?

G: We're talking probably in the – well into the thirties. You know, late twenties, um, early – and of course his – that's when his grandfather was doing it, but even before that, when they were using sails on oyster luggers, it was the same thing. I mean his dad – his grandfather had one of the very first oyster boats that had an engine in it – had a big old one-cylinder engine, and it would go, "doo doof, doo doof" and it was real slow, but it got them where they were going. Prior to that, they were using oyster luggers that were – had sails. So you can imagine how long – I mean their time frame really got stretched then, but at least when little engines became affordable and they could afford to put them in boats, um, they were able to sell twice as many, probably. But it was very hard work – I mean you had oyster tongs you had to pick them up, or put them on the decks, sort them, grade them – put them in sacks, and you had – they only lived so long that way. You got to get them up the road quick.

R: I've seen many pictures – I've been very interested in the sailing lugger.

G: Mmhmm.

R: For years now. And I've seen pictures of uh, for instance, uh, near Cheniere, and um, Manila Village, um you know, sail luggers. Could you talk a bit about that?

G: Yes, actually, uh, Nicholls State University built one. I don't know if you've seen it that...

R: Yeah.

G: ...that wooden boat project that they did. And they used pictures of, pictures of boats because there are none that I know of that are still here. And actually the design I think of oyster boats has transferred itself down from those little oyster luggers - sail ones, all the way to some of the new current ones they have. Um, they were always big flat decks to put the oysters on of course, but if you'll notice that the cabins were built up fairly high, and at some point I guess when it was oyster lugger, they had the uh, the sail positioned far enough back in order to catch the wind. Because we always have a nice prevailing winds here. I've never actually seen one except the one that, you know that Nicholls built, but they were quite prevalent, and they used them for other things too, beyond oyster lugger. Um, Grand Isle at one point was a big uh, cucumber – we brought in the first cucumbers to the French Market, and when it was a big farming area. And they would go in on those boats because that's what – that's the kind of boats they had.

R: A lot of the sail designs – I've seen were like square one...

G: Big square rigger?

R: Yeah. No jib, nothing like that.

G: I think that probably it's the easiest design sail to use – it's also the biggest sail area that you can use on a – on a boat like that where you can just turn it easy, and you get the maximum use of the wind. And it's also a big enough – to balance the sail with the keel of the boat, you know, there's some balancing that's gotta go on there, and I'm sure they figured that out a lot easier than um, schooner

design, or catch design where you've got multiple sails. One sail was easy to handle. Plus it stayed out of their way. You know, it left them more room for their product.

R: So I guess at one time, it's safe to say that was the primary mode of, not transport, but travel.

G: Yes. I would think that probably up until the engine became a serious, you know, a really affordable product for people to use, that sails were. I mean that's how the pirates got here, and everybody was, you know, everybody sailed. Um, these were especially, especially good boats because they were mainly flat bottomed and they had – for the shallow draft around here, and um, in fact there's still some boat design is still referred to as the Lafitte skiff. You know, because it had that flat bottom design on it. But the big one sail, you still see they're used across the world. I mean that's not an unusual um, everything from Chinese just on back used that. It's just a very practical type of um, sail. And two – you didn't have to worry about cutting it in the in odd shapes and things like that for jibs and – they didn't have sail making – I'm sure they didn't have those kinds of skills here.

R: Yeah, the basic...

G: Basic square sail. Easy to put up – easy to tie up, um, no big trick, you know, to do.

R: Um, you brought up the Lafitte skiff. Did it get its name from being developed near Lafitte?

G: I don't know if it was – I have – I've heard two arguments about that. I've heard that actually it was Jean Lafitte because when he brought in his boats, they got smaller, and I mean the bigger boats stayed out, but then the smaller boats to bring the cargo up into New Orleans, uh, had to be smaller, and they had to be flatter bottom because what we see now – there's ten, twelve feet of water immediately behind the island, but back then, there was only – you know, there might have been as little as two or three feet. So they had to have very, very shallow draft vessels to get their product, - their spoils, whatever, up into the city. So that – I've heard it you know, that it's a Lafitte skiff, but I think it has more to do with the fact that it was just a shallow draft boat. One whether – and who – how did Lafitte get its name? Its from Jean Lafitte? You know, there's a lot of mystery there. So, but I think as a practical matter – whoever was doing that, realized right away, you can't have big, old, heavy keeled boat that's gonna get you up the road.

R: What's always impressed me as sort of a bank shrimp, type boat. Low draft, you know, that kind of thing.

G: Right, right. And I don't know when they started actually doing shrimping. That's with nets – I'm sure they went out – I don't know if they really caught shrimp, um, how they started catching shrimp. I don't know. I really have not thought about that too hard. I know that Indians ate oysters, so they understood oysters, but they grew along the shoreline. They were easy to get to. Shrimp are another matter unless they're jumping out of the water in our hands. I don't know how they figured out how to put a net in there – how that industry got started, but pulling up a net full of shrimp had to be an arduous task. Um, I know there were people basically used to hunt and trap and did a lot of that and oystering, and then as a secondary industry, especially after the Second World War, then people started shrimping. There

must've been mild shrimping going on, you know, slight shrimping, and they probably doing it with you know nets and sails, but that is such a perishable product, it might not have been worth taking care of until they could get a motor on a boat where they could get their product back and forth quick. And they had ways to transport it up the road. If you're trawling and you didn't want to stop to drive up to the city or wherever you're gonna sell it, or to the drying where they were drying them, you know, things like that. So they were a very perishable product, so until somebody got here with the knowledge of how to dry shrimp, it really weren't easy to, to handle.

R: There were no live wells or anything like that?

G: I don't think so. I've never heard anybody talk about that. Now I've talked to shrimpers – a lot of shrimpers. Um, my father-in-law was a shrimper for instance, and um, as a child, um, a lot of people who had boats, no matter what kind of boat they had, they might - they might shrimp in the summer, oyster in the winter. And the main problem was if you caught too much, what are you gonna do with it? You got to get it – you got to be able to get the product, you know, up the road, so after the advent of motors, and then of course man bring smart animal, they figure out really quick how to make life easier in the shrimp boat, and you know, now they have computers and satellite TV's and air conditioning, where back then if you had a motor a wench to get the trough up, that was a big plus. So, and now they have big huge refrigerator boats that can stay offshore a long time before they have to come in, but back then they didn't have that.

R: You mentioned Jean Lafitte. Um, do you have any stories or memories of that?

G: I don't really have any stories or memories necessarily of him personally, I've heard tons of stories, read many, many accounts. Um, I think that probably one of the most interesting stories to me is not so much what he did here on Grand Isle or Grand Terre or wherever he was at. I don't think – I think, well one important thing was when he fought in the War of 1812, you know, with the um, United States. I think that was kind of an interesting – politics makes strange pitfalls, you know, that sort of thing. I thought that was interesting. But what got me was that when he left Grand Isle, he goes supposedly to Galveston, and there he just kind of falls off the face of the map. They have no recollection of him anywhere past that, and my thought then was well where did he go beyond that? And of course stories have him turning up in different places all the way down the coast all the way back down to, you know, way below Mexico and places like that. So my, my one thought is – he was probably a very busy man. Probably a whole lot more, um, to him than what we, we just kind of similarly turned him as a pirate, and that he was uh, immortalized with the Yul Brynner movie and that sort of thing. But I think he was probably a man who was an entrepreneur of his age and saw where he could make a buck, and started working on it, and probably did very well for himself. But his political fortunes changed after the war – you know, so he kind of had to stay ahead of that. Much the same as people we know today, you know.

R: He referred to himself as a privateer.

G: Right. Yes. He um, somehow um, as all entrepreneurs probably got on the wrong side of the law, and there's copus stories about that. (Copus?) stories. And whether any of them are true or not, all you have is whatever's been written down in some sort of um, document having to do with the law, and even

there there's two sides of the story, because he was obviously bringing in things that people were buying in the city, and they were his customer, and probably the only reason that the law ever got after him was the fact that we wasn't paying taxes on it. If he'd have been paying taxes on it, he probably would've been okay.

R: Yeah.

G: You know, if you don't follow the tax man, you're always running into problems.

R: Yeah.

G: So...

R: Plus (inaudible).

G: Well yeah, we already mentioned how he got his inventory, but I mean you know, he was uh, he was a pirate or a privateer, but then there's this – you know there's stories about how he was given permission to attack certain ships and that sort of thing. So you don't know. You don't know what under the table deal was made. I mean it's Louisiana – we're notorious for this, so who knows what agreement was made. And at that point, we'd been under how many flags? And by the time the news got down that New Orleans had changed from the Spanish to the French or whatever, I mean it might've been two years before the story ever got to Grand Isle, so who knows how, how that was done. And I'm sure back then everybody was pretty much operating in their own interests, which pretty much is the way it still is today. But – and it was a great target. He was a great story, you know, it was just a great big personality.

R: Would it be fair to say that there were a number of Native American influences in – the way he um, did uh his trading practices?

G: Well, the Native Americans who were here, I think were the Chitimachas and the Houmas. Houmas tribes. And they actually were quite um, from what I read, were quite busy people. I mean they were not um, they lived there, but they were nomadic, so they traveled up and down the coast, and maybe perhaps they helped him find, you know, a way up the road. I don't know – there were some Indian mounds and things like that. one of them is called little temple where he supposedly had a read out there – and there's a cannon out there, and they used it just as a way to protect that, that barrier – that is – not that island, that pass right there. But whether that's true or not is really hard to say – and then every once in a while, they will find – they were digging a pipeline not too long ago, and they found an old boat sitting there. And it probably sank, you know, as they were digging through this pipeline they found it. Who knows what the story is there, you know. The um, the sea very seldom gives up its secrets on those things.

R: Yeah. Have you ever heard the term Maroons?

G: Maroons.

R: They were these escaped slaves, and they sort of intermarried partly with the Houmas and so forth, or you know, but the idea of renegade communities that lived here and there along the marsh.

G: What I've heard about them has sort of what you just said, and because of the, the Indians being so private, and so elusive really, you know. I mean, if they didn't like what was going on, they picked up. They moved ten miles in the other direction, you know. So they were hard to track for one thing back then. And I could see where that would be very, very true. I've heard that term before, but as far as knowing anyone, now you look at when I first moved here in the 60s, there were people who were obviously of Indian descent. You could look at those folks. They had the look, and they did have some of those features, um, that we associate with um, people who have intermarried that way. And I don't know – you know it's kind of – I don't know what the Indians looked like before – they became involved with the, the runaway slaves. I'm sure there was a little of that – I mean all those stories have a basis somewhere um, that you hear. How big an affect it had on this area I don't know. Because - most of those people were like say were fairly elusive and they really – they didn't really want to interact with people, other people. They pretty much stayed to themselves. Um, and they didn't – but of course, it's like anything else. I'm sure they lost habitat, they lost land, and so they really didn't want to have anything to do with the folks that were taking it from them.

R: Yeah. Could you talk a little bit about the demographics of Cheniere Caminada during the 1800s?

G: Um, I've done some reading on that, and what I found is that basically in the census I believe of 1810, they came down here, and when they got here, Cheniere was uh, they just had that big storm in 1893 so Cheniere was pretty much wiped off the map. There were very few houses there, and I think that Cheniere actually means "oak." And what happened – they had basically cut down all the trees to build houses to they had left themselves exposed to the elements of you know, storm, but this was a huge, mega storm. Just off the wall, huge storm. So that end of the world, you know, the western end of the Cheniere was pretty much not gone, but it was decimated pretty badly. They say in the 1810 census that there were like four distinct land – you know, divisions of property here on the island, and it was basically all farming. There were generally women with children and some sort of person who was working, because the men were always out uh, trapping, or hunting, or fishing. Now someone said to me one time, well maybe they just didn't want to be counted, or they didn't want their names put down, which it could be because they might be leftover pirates, or you know, folks whose names were on a list somewhere being looked for, and it could well be. And I always thought that well, it made sense. Because generally um, that's – it would've been a very hard life for a woman and several kids to make it by themselves. There were slaves, not many, but there were some on the island here. But you gotta understand the island at that point was owned by two or three people. And they were using it as a big truck garden. And I guess it was the folks that – because if it hit Cheniere that bad, it hit Grand Isle just as bad. I mean, you know, geographically they're so close. That they – I'm sure the island took a big hard hit. So you figure from 1893 to 1910, you're looking at about 20 years, something like that, so they've had time to come back, repopulate, and build new structures and things like that. And they say that they were all – raised Acadian cottages, which you see today, and they're replicated still today. But mainly they're two bedrooms with an attic to sleep in upstairs, um, front porch, big double doors so the wind will pass through –which there are some examples of that still here on the island. And basically, um,

that's all they had. They once in a while a packet boat would come down and bring them supplies, or their - I guess they brought their farm goods up to New Orleans, you know, they resupply like that. And a lot of people don't realize - this is, you know, this is still during the timeframe that Lafitte is still operating - still 18 - he didn't leave until the War of 1812. And so he was still basically in the area, and this - but he really didn't have much to do with Grand Isle because there was nothing here. I mean it was a farm area. It was just like a plantation.

R: Sugarcane plantation.

G: Sugarcane plantation, uh, cucumbers, um, they had their own little mill here I think. They had a mill across on Grand Terre also. That was a large - because nobody really lived over there either. And they would go and plant the cane, come back, but they would mill it. There used to be a big tall chimney there where they burned um, and made syrup. It has long since fallen into the beach, but..

R: So the Acadian style homes were basically on Cheniere.

G: They were in both places. I think they were in both, places. And actually that term that - raised Acadian cottage refers to I think a lot of areas because just because the swampy areas and things like that - it was just a little raised. Generally they were raised two room cottages. Your food service and everything on one - and everyone slept in the other room. If they had a, you know, the attic space so the heat could rise above that - that's where the kids slept - up in the attic.

R: It's well known that the Filipino influence of the raised stilt.

G: Mmm yes.

R: Influenced um, you know, fishing villages like Manila, places like Cheniere Caminada. Can you talk a little bit about that?

G: Well basically we think, and if you think back to 1810, you were looking at a vast um, area that was probably full of swamp marsh, I mean um, marsh. You know, marsh and prairie rather than hard sand, because people couldn't go to the beach really because the beach was just one big pile of whatever got washed up. And there were accounts of trying to get to the beach, and you had to, you know, you had to go through past big huge trees and things like that, and in the back where they built most of these raised cottages, it just made sense because you had times of high tide, but they'd only build as high as they could physically pick a tree up, and you're talking about folks who didn't have a crane to pick up, you know, the piling up to create the house. So I'm sure they got them up as high as they could, and probably wherever solid ground was knowing that it's gonna - there's a chance something's gonna flood, so I'm sure they built things up. In Manila Village and in Chinatown over in Cheniere, um, they put they raised everything - everything was raised that way. But I'm sure it had more to do with just high tides and low tides and things like that because they didn't want to get wet. I've seen pictures of you know the 1800s of um, little houses like that. And they had a little raised sidewalks - well not sidewalks in the sense that we do, but they were like wooden paths um, where they raised up so they could walk during high tide. They just probably didn't have the machinery to build up high, so it was just easier.

R: And what do you think Manila Village would've looked like?

G: I would imagine if Manila Village um, was probably manned by the Filipinos or the Chinese who were brought over. And they knew how to dry shrimp because that's an old, old, old process. And I'm sure they put their drying beds up on high, high as high as they could get them up – according to the height of the tree that was around and they put it in the water. Um, I've actually been past the old Manila Village, and actually, um, you know, they're above the ground, but it's not that high, actually. But I – I contributed mainly to what they had to work with. You know, they didn't have tall pine trees. They had big oak trees which tend to look the shape of the wind, so you didn't have straight trees to work with. It's not like driving through Mississippi where you have a big tall pine tree that you could cut down and drop it in the water and – and then too dropping it in the water. How did they drop it in the water? How did they get it to go?

R: How'd they get it squared up?

G: Yeah, how'd they get it all squared up? I'm sure there were drying platforms in um, I think they had – I don't want to say net, but it was some kind of fabric or some kind of – because they didn't have plywood in the sense that we have plywood. So they were probably slat affairs with some kind of net or fabric and at some point I think they would pick the fabric up and kind of do this and toss it up a little bit, and flip the shrimp over so they would dry, you know, evenly across that. And I'm sure they salted them too, which helped out a whole lot. Um, who know s what they – you know, made them out of – made the drying actual fabric they used for that. Um, it's whatever they probably had at hand because people back then just used whatever they had. They were very ingenious about doing that sort of thing. And if – I guess if the salt came in a bag, they probably took the bag next year and turned it into something like that. I'm not saying that's what happened – I'm just saying that – you know, being good folks, being able to renew things.

R: Then there's the - well known dancing the shrimp.

G: Well yeah. The flipping of them. You know, or you're talking about when they would dry them – to dry them?

R: Yeah. When they separate the hulls.

G: Oh yeah. Yeah. Well, I've never actually – I've seen that done - my mother-in-law did that one time for my kids to show them how it was done, and she took a – they caught some shrimp, and really it depended on the size of the shrimp too. How long they had to dry, and how you had to do it. But she basically took a pillowcase and she said this is how they used to do it. And she laid them out for a couple days, and my kids were just fascinated because it was just like- they're gonna dry, like you have to put them in the refrigerator because they thought this was so wild you know, so they did dry out. So after they had dried sufficiently, she put them in a pillowcase, and would shake them for a – and hung it on the clothesline for a couple of days. I think it was just to make sure that the um, they were completely dry you know, that they were all dry. Then she shook the um, shook the shells out somehow. I don't

know if there was a – that part she had a tough time doing because I don't think we had enough salt on them in our little experiment. I mean they had to put quite a bit of salt to get them to separate.

R: So a lot of people do that?

G: Well, I've seen people do that up the bayou, actually. Um, they would dry them just, you know, I caught some shrimp, they're too small...

R: Okay. We left off with the dancing the shrimp.

Well I've heard different stories about that. My mother in law used to say they used to shake them somehow – I don't know how the shaking went on, but - and then I've heard the story of the dancing of the shrimp where they had the special covers on the shoes, and they would dance through them and kick the shells, and I guess it's sort of like when people separate wheat shafts, you know, they separate a wheat shaft. Kind of the same idea – you know, throw it up and the shells are flying, and the shrimp would come back down. Um, I've never actually seen it done that way, but I have seen it shaking in the – she would just put it in a clothesline – put it over a clothesline and shake it every once in a while. And as the shells would dry, they would just shake loose, and then she would go through them and pull out the dried shrimp.

R: Well Manila Village seemed to have quite a little production.

G: Oh, they did, oh yes. They sure did, because they were doing shrimp in huge quantities I would imagine. And the way they did it, I'm sure they probably had two or three systems going. I'm sure they had a way of shaking them, and they had to salt them properly. I would think the salt and was the big deal that made it work the best. And once you got anything once it dries enough in the sun or with the salt, it's gonna pull away from the shell. But you still have to kind of break that shell away to get it to – to go, and I'm sure they had lots of ways. I bet they probably um, just thinking about it, if I were doing it, I would do some kind of you know, with the, uh, manipulate it some way where you're shaking it harder. Now the shrimp dance – I've heard of that, but I can't speak to that because I've never actually seen it done, so there's probably folks who used to do that, but I'm sure there's lots of different ways they did it.

R: Well I've also heard that they dried um, speckled trout on these platforms.

G: As with a lot of societies and cultures that dry fish, um, these fish are generally – our fish tend to be not as thick meated as like, cod and fish like that. But they would probably dry pretty fast. And if you salted them really quickly, got them in, salted them, I bet they would go really nicely. Um, I know contemporary folks that smoke fish – and I would imagine they probably did a little bit of smoking, a little bit of that too. I know many folks who still smoke mullet for instance. Love mullet, and they'll smoke it, and that is some of the best eating.

R: I bet.

G: It was wonderful, and there again, who knows, because I mean, I haven't been um, necessarily read a whole lot about that. I know John Folse in his big cooking book talks about the different ways that people – the Chitimachas did it – and I'm sure they smoked fish.

R: Do you think – I know a lot of clam ridges exist between Old Theriot to Morgan City. Were there anything – like resembling that around here?

G: Um, I actually I spoke to some folks who know about that. And they said the clams here are not the same as the clams that are normally eaten. They're not really good – we wouldn't eat them. We'd much prefer to eat an oyster over those clams. Um, I think too that they're you know there's huge clam ridges all around, you know, they've been around forever. And there's a lot of clam shells everywhere. And they probably the Indians probably made a better use of them than we have as far as just eating and go. There again it's probably a case of – it's a really small. They were pretty small by the time you got the clam out – what you do with it - you gotta do some of them immediately. And food preservation back then was a lot harder than it is now because you, you just didn't have the refrigeration. Plus you had to have somebody – a market for them. And obviously they must – no market really ever grew out of it. Because then otherwise they would still be harvesting I would think. Um, although, a couple of years ago, there were – Florida put up a big thing and started doing clams. And they were growing them in um, nets that would be suspended in the water much the same as an LSU project that's going on here in Grand Isle with oysters.

R: Yeah. It's been said that, that um, the coastal erosion problem started with the dredging of shells along the barrier Islands.

G: That is probably – that is probably very true in that shells became a way to build highways. They'd been used for construction. You can go into old, old buildings – in fact the fort Livingston across on Grand Terre – if you get up next to it, and the walls are probably six feet thick in some places – what they did is they had brick and then they filled in with shells. You can see the shells and mud. And the shells are in there, and they really probably um, were kind of over, overzealously used, whether they were the star of coastal erosion, I don't know. I think it was the – in some places that's probably true. I don't think it's that way in every place, especially here on the island, knowing our island, because I don't know of any big shell ridges right around here. There are some further out. There was a place called Jackie's Camp, which is on the four bayous, which is on the other side of Grand Terre. And there used to be a huge shell pile there, and there was a camp, and Andy's grandfather – they would tie up there at night when they were oystering. And they had this guy who had a camp and I assume his name is Jack. Jackie's camp. And that was built on a big huge shell pile. That has over time just sort of, you know, melted away without any dredging done to it. Um, I think in Lake Ponchartrain, there's been some – huge amounts of concern about that – and in other places, and it probably didn't help anywhere they do heavy duty dredging where they're taking away land mass. But I couldn't say that was a big issue here on the island.

R: Yeah, because it seems like um, a mound you know, of clam shells basically is so strong, like cement.

G: Right.

R: You know, and that would be immovable against a storm surge.

G: Probably, probably was, and it's probably the thinking that got us the rocks out here on the front of the island. Immovable, huge, heavy, um, easily moved to the area, you know, just bring them by barge wherever you get them from, and Miss – Tennessee, wherever they do rock quarries and things like that. Yes, I would think that the natural, at one time the natural barrier was the clam shell. Um, I've never seen huge amounts of clam shells here even when you dig down, if you digging a hole here, you don't see like a layer of clam shells. You don't see that, or I haven't in my yard. They probably further up, I've seen them, but not so much here on the island.

R: Freshwater lakes.

G: Yeah, freshwater lakes. Because they were freshwater clams to start with, so we just didn't have as many. Now when it was the flow of the Mississippi coming through here and depositing things here where we had a much bigger freshwater flush, then I could see where you probably, you know kept them and of course after that died, after that stopped being done in the early – when they built the Mississippi levee – the Mississippi River levee – well that killed that whole -all those, those clams that they – they're production probably came to a screeching halt.

R: That brings up an interesting question. Um, when they dammed up Bayou Lafourche, before that, the um, the Lafourche area, I mean, um, the uh, the area down Bayou Lafourche coming down here must've been a natural ravine type area.

G: Oh it was. It was. Um, in fact, after the folks left Cheniere after that big storm in 1893, many of them just moved to Leeville. That's as far up as they got – which to them was a major trek I'm sure. You know, and there – because of that freshwater flow, Leeville was known as a huge orange grove – they brought their trees and they had huge, huge orange groves, you know, not plantations, but they had farms, and they had, you know, a little village, and basically the town of Leeville, and because of that freshwater flush, there were able to keep the salinity correct in the marsh. Plus there was enough dry land there because it was a ridge, obviously, or they would've never stopped there. The land must've been high enough up. And they, then, you had the freshwater coming through that kept that very important um, salinity going there. Now, or lack of salinity. As you went further up the bayou, there again, I they flooded during high – just like when New Orleans would flood or South Louisiana would flood, they flooded too because they were um, you know, just a tributary of the Mississippi, and so when it flooded, they flooded. And that's why a lot of the houses were built up. And the, and for a long time everybody who came to South Louisiana lived up – you know lived way up. Bu they did it out of just self preservation, and my mother-in-law again – they even put their chicken coops up on um, you know, the little pilings like that. They'd raise them up two or three feet instead of being flat on the ground because during those times, when you have that natural flooding, anyway she says it wouldn't last too long, you know, maybe a week or two of three inches, but it made a mess – you know, just a typical mess. And people got tired of that, you know. When in the – stories she had from her ancestors – they got tired of having that happen, and then that really huge flood that happened in...

R: '27.

G: '27 I think. When that one hit, it flooded areas huge, huge areas of Louisiana. I mean all the way down to Greenville, Mississippi. All the way down. They were just inundated. And they just I guess at that point prevailing wisdom was– we gotta do something, because we have people living in areas that need protection. And when they dammed it up, um, it created an interesting little situation, and although we still get water out of the, out of the Mississippi River – the bayou is still fed that way, and there's a where in Thibodaux that slows down the flow. But it does still get it, but it's not enough to stem salt water intrusion, which in my humble opinion is causing a major, um, problem. Huge problem.

R: Right. Um, which brings me to my next question. Um, as we witness more and more marsh disappearing, and the dis – subsidence of marsh, and Grand Isle itself, um, sort of what do you see the role of Grand Isle being now?

G: Grand Isle is actually I think the most pivotal piece of property in South Louisiana. It is basically a huge cork in a wine bottle. Everyone over here equates everything with food, so here you go. If they allow – if Grand Isle is allowed to just become uninhabited and not cared for, and no one cares, they just as well – and I say this at every art exhibition – which is the thing we do here on the island to bring coastal erosion to the forefront of the people's minds – they're just as well to bulkhead the capitol steps in Baton Rouge because once Grand Isle goes, Grand Terre's gonna go last – what's left of you know, what's left of Terrebonne Parish. That is all going to turn to water and there's nothing that's gonna stop the Gulf of Mexico once it gets started. It's you know, you have to take a place and say, this is as far back as we're gonna stop, and we're gonna do what it takes to protect this area because it allows right now, we protect all this marsh behind us. We protect it from two or three things. One, we protect it from, um, just salt water running across it rapidly, you know, 4, 5, 10 feet deep, which would kill it instantly, but we also keep um, that area back there um, as an estuary area. Plus as a um, just as a physical barrier for um, for the slowdown of water coming through there because the speed of the water coming through is really what tears up the bottom, which pulls out the plants. And stops the growth of um – and then the salt water intrusion, you know it's just you know killing it. So that's part of – you can see where we're in places where we're not there, you can drive up to here and Leeville, and you could see where it's right on the – where right along the coastline, and it's dying at an alarming rate. I mean it's just trying hard. But it's just – it's adapting as fast as it can, but it's not able to overcome the salt water intrusion.

R: So you mentioned the speed of the water. Um, this hydrology, not just in the passes, but from the tides, have an impact on this?

G: Well yeah, but you figure um, say for instance, if you – if were to not have this island and right now it's pretty calm, there's nothing in the gulf so it's pretty calm right sitting out there. But if you were to have a storm and the storm surge starts coming in, the island is what stops or breaks the first waves of the storm surge. We stop it. And for every mile of marsh, it slows down even more. And without us to take that first big wave, that whole area could not do it because as it goes in, it also pulls back, you know, it pulls itself backwards, it's tumbling up big huge mats of grass, and um, saw grass as it goes. So yeah. This is – you know, we're kind of like – when they say barrier island, that's what they mean. It's the barrier between the gulf and the um, the marshland back there. And it's not gonna – it's not going to rebuild itself. It can't. you know, it just can't do it – not with the Mississippi River flooding, you know,

the um, leaved off. And I'm not in favor of, let's levee the river. Not in favor of that, but I think through hydrology, there should be a way that we could reintroduce into the marsh more freshwater than what's coming down there now. And the silt – I mean you figure Isle was being washed out 5000 feet out in the gulf out there. You know, in the mouth of the river just pushes it right out. There's got to be a way that we can reposition some of that over here and um, recreate help us to recreate – there's many projects out there doing it. And there's many good groups who are studying it. It's um – and they're trying to figure out the best way to do it. I mean I've given those guys a – all those organizations that are looking at that, but everybody who's studied the situation has come to the same conclusion basically. Um, we've got too much salt water going into these places that salt water wasn't really intended.

R: So it's fair to say that after '27, they basically have strangled this area.

G: Well they've starved it. Um, they didn't – they didn't really strangle it and kill it quick, but they basically started starving the marsh, and it wasn't – it took a while for it to really show up. I can remember as a kid when I was about 13 years old riding across the Leeville bridge, and it was just grass, and in my mind it was all solid land. And it was – it was basically a salt water marsh. I mean, you couldn't really walk through it, but it was thick enough you know, you get out there, and animals could live on it and things like that. Now, that's all gone. You look at it over that bridge, and it's just water. And the water's only two or three feet deep now, but if Grand Isle goes, it's gonna be six or eight feet deep. And when it gets six or eight feet deep, unless you're living in a seriously leaved area, a really seriously really leaved area, you're not gonna be able to live, um comfortably. And you know, it's just that the, the marsh is being starved. It just doesn't have what it needs to fight the salinity.

R: And there's no way you can build a levee system around all of South Terrebonne to here.

G: I don't know – there's many proposals, - there's many plans, there's many studies that are being done, everybody's talked about it, it's been, um, it's been looked at for quite some time. They really and truly – I don't think they know what to do. Now having been to Holland and seen what the Dutch have done with a windmill, you know. I mean we're talking a windmill here. We're not – run by wind power – we're not talking big hydraulic engines, and you know, that sort of thing at their disposal. I don't know why we can't come up with something that would be good. I think where our problem lies is that we have a lot of private interests that nobody wants to hurt anybody, particularly, but at some point it's gonna come down to we've got to do something. And I think if Katrina – there's for every bad thing, there's usually a good thing that evolves out of it, and I think with Katrina, one of the best things that ever happened that it opened the eyes of people beyond us who were here on the front line to see what, what can really happen, and water is, you know, is – it seeks its own level. And water doesn't care whether you're rich, poor, in a city, or out in the country. It's gonna do what it's gonna do. And that was a grand case of – here's what happens when you've got a situation with water involved that's not properly managed. And when the 17th St. Canal went down, flooded the city, 80% of the city was flooded, talking about New Orleans, and it wasn't until then that they even realized how serious the problem was because you - as a person who lives on the island, and you try to talk to people about – like that, and they were, they really didn't get it. They really – you know, we're New Orleans; we're too

far up. You know, we're someplace else. We've got levees. And when that one broke and allowed Lake Ponchartrain to flow in, suddenly...

R: Years ago, the Industrial Canal built conduits that... (inaudible)

G: Yes. Just yep. Right, yeah. Exactly. And instead of - and I think up until then they just really didn't have a sense of the urgency of getting this done. Now there's some really great programs and some um, like Save Our Lake now is now looking at Save Our Coast. One of my favorite um, websites that I go to every once in a while is the uh, America's Wetlands. They started off with a very small footprint they were interested in. Now after the last two storms, then they hit, you know, that of course, Mississippi has the same problem we do, you know. They've been hit with Katrina also, and Camille and all those other big storms, but now it's all the way over to Texas, and now their footprint on their map is the entire Gulf Coast which is the only way we're actually gonna be able to do something is if we get a regional look at this because individually, each little Levee Board could say, well I'm gonna levee off this property. And you know, we're not - that's what we're gonna do. Unfortunately, on the - when you get up into that level of regional um, people, or that many people, a lot of private interests are looked at. And you're looking at federal money that's gotta be sent out for it, and then you're looking at what the Corps gotta be involved with this, and it's a huge, huge, huge problem. I mean Louisiana just now has come up with a master plan. I don't agree with all the master plan. But I think that um, the, at least they're trying. They're coming up with something. They've been forced to really look at it and do something. I think in Grand Isle's case we are still habitable. We're still a great place. We're just a wonderful um, it's almost like a little secret place sometimes for people to come to where you can get away from the rat race of the city and things like that, and as long as people love it and take care of it, Grand Isle stands a chance of making it. But I think the whole coastline needs to be protected, I think we need to rock - we need to rock the whole coastline. We need to really look at that seriously.

R: You bring up an interesting um, point, and I was gonna ask about this. The idea of the importance of Grand Isle just in terms of personal and individual freedom - what is the - what is the main difference you would say between island life and being on the mainland?

G: Well quite honestly, islands are just - all islands are interesting because they're different. They are generally surrounded by water, which means you gotta work to get to them. You can't just run across the street. You gotta get across it somehow where a big boat, um, or bridge. You know, and there's a certain amount of work there. But island life really and truly there's something about when you cross the Leeville bridge, and you're driving through Golden Meadow, and you're driving in Cutoff, you've left New Orleans, or you've left Baton Rouge, and oh traffic is terrible, and street lights, and people driving 90 miles an hour, and rah rah rah rah rah rah rah. When you get to the Leeville bridge, and you look at it, it's a big horizon. It's one of the first places you can actually see horizon in South Louisiana, because A - you're high enough up, and B - you're high enough to where you go (breathes in and out.) You start to see water, and you can really see the marsh. Then as you drive on through, your blood pressure starts to drop a little, and by the time you, you get past Fourchon and you're on your way, you can really see the marsh, and you start to see the fish jumping along the ditches, and it's even though there are little trees dying on the side of the - then by the time you really get the island in your view, and you're like, oh

yeah. Well when you cross the bridge coming on to the island, as people have told me, and I've experienced myself, it's like, I'm home. And you relax. Because our – it's true. On the island, the pace of life's a little slower, we don't get as excited, we don't have as many um, we don't have any stoplights, we don't have a lot of the modern things that people take for granted, we don't have a McDonalds on every corner, um, I mean, Grand Isle is smaller than the average Houston subdivision. And if you want to come to the isle and you want to enjoy it, it's one of the few places where you can still go, sit on the island on your front porch, people know you when you walk by, or you don't have to know anybody. You can just sit here and be totally relaxed and not do anything. I have a very small campground, and I have people coming in from all over the United States. And they all similarly say the same thing. They cannot get this sort of relaxation anywhere else. And ask such people to this day come down you know we'll build lovely camps, or fix up the old family camp, and it's been something people have done for years and years, and generally, most of the camp owners here I'm talking about just summer folk, don't live more than 250 miles away. So Grand Isle is this private little quiet oasis for them. You know, they live in Lafayette or Baton Rouge, or maybe New Orleans, and it's not people that are coming from miles and miles and miles away generally, it's people who are coming here who know about the island, and it's their own little private paradise. And it's quiet, they can go on the beach, they walk on the beach, or they can lie on the beach and do nothing, or you can sit on your porch and enjoy the breeze. There's always a lovely breeze in the afternoon. If you just want to take a nap, you can do that. It's just one of those precious little places that are getting further and further and further apart. I have campers that come to me every year – one set from Missouri, and one set from Michigan, and one set from Illinois. And they book it way in advance. They want to be here for right after Christmas, New Years, you know, January and February, they want to do Carnival, March, and they leave usually right before Easter, to get back home, you know. And this is – they've been around the world, these people. And they love coming here just because it's quiet, you can – there's no line at the grocery store particularly, everybody knows your name, you know, it's just one of those little rare spots that's got a lot of things going for it, and it's good to come and visit.

R: I agree, you know, just being here, my solar plexus – it goes right to it. You know, I just feel – it's just the pressure - you must be doing something all the time. It's gone.

G: It's gone. That's right.

R: You know, the pressure to be a consumer. To participate in society. It's like all that's gone.

G: Well maybe because we don't have anything – you know – we have so few – you know, most people here are pretty self sufficient. You go in anybody's camp, there's a boiling pot, there's fishing lines, there's lanterns, I mean the power – the power does go off after a storm – we may not have power for two weeks. And you know, you get used to that. It's not fun, but you don't mind it after a while. You kind of get to – well I'm going fish, or I'm going...

R: How do you endure mosquito plagues or mosquito swarms?

Well, that is almost um, we got that under control here. Actually the town sprays a larvicide, which really gets rid of most of the problem. And for the most part, you've always got a nice breeze. I mean we

sat out last night and, and had a shrimp boil, and it was well dark. There were a few, just a few mosquitoes, just as um, you know, as it was starting to get dark, but after that there weren't any. I mean that's that's why they make Skin So Soft because you can kind of spray it on you, and it does them away. If you fact, another good thing that comes out of a storm, the other end of the island – the front end of the island where the bridge is, that used to be an area that was kind of low. It had mosquito pits in there. There were you know mosquitoes in little low areas, slews that would stay wet, you know, after a big rain. Well now with the levee coming down there, now they've all had their yards filled in, so that is gone. You're not having as much problem. We have worse problems when the wind blows from the north. Because then we're getting the mosquitoes out of the – you know, the close to Golden Meadow. I call them Golden Meadow mosquitoes. They come flying in, you know, but as long as the wind's coming off the South off the water, you know you have that really nice, um, breeze that for the most part you don't have any problems.

R: What was it like, say in the past?

G: Well in the past before they had larvicides, yes, it was terrible. Everybody had to have screens and you, you know there was not as much air conditioning and that sort of thing. And I guess it was pretty bad. I've got several older friends who tell me that they would come down and your job was you got in before it got dark, and you kept the wind – you know, screens had to be shut, and you took real good care of your screens because you wanted to make sure those mosquitoes did not get in, because you're sleeping, generally, you know, with the breeze – not with air conditioning. But once you got accustomed to handling it, you know, it wasn't a problem. I can remember coming down here as a teenager and one of the camps we stayed in had no air conditioning. They never had air conditioning. Well we'd be inside, immediately, and everybody had a little screened in porch. Might not have been huge, but little screened in porch. And we got better with screening, and as time went on, well they got air conditioning, and so they kind of took away from that, but um, there's something soothing about just looking out of your window. There's something – you know, if you could see the water. There's something soothing about hearing the, the water lapping up against the beach. You know, people go, well like for instance I kind of live in the middle of the island, and I go, how do you think you can how can you tell you're on a beach? I go, because I can hear it! I can hear, I can hear the waves, I can hear the – just that sound of the sea – just like when you pick up and listen to a shell. You can hear that also. And when you go to the beach, there again, there is no place better than that. there's just – you cannot do, um, there's no big loud, it's not like Atlantic City where you got people selling stuff, there's - you can't drive on the beach, you can't drive a golf cart, you can't take motorcycles. I mean the emergency people have, you know, those kinds of facilities if somebody gets hurt on the beach, but this is rare. You don't see that in most places. And it's wonderful. You know, it's just – it's just terrific. It's very rare, very special.

R: Rhythm of the surf – in fact last night, I've noticed I don't' know if it's a radio beacon or what, but there's just very faint, mid sort of mid high frequency. I don't' know if that's coming from platforms or what, but I've taped them 'cause like in Cameron, same thing.

G: That probably is some sort of a homing device for the FFA, or somebody like that. There's a spot on the island with four towers where that is part of, um, the FFA I think. Flying in, and of course we have Exxon's facility down there where we have helicopters. It's probably something to do with that. It's - that would be my guess. Either that or it's a transformer over on the electric pole that's slowly going out. Haha.

R: Yeah. Um, well, we're almost on the end of this tape. Is there anything else you can think of?

G: I would say that in the long run, in the very long run, um, long after I'm gone, if they do not protect Grand Isle, and they do not try to take care of it, and let it be kept and restored and nourished - Grand Isle as well as all the barrier islands along the way, um, they'll be losing a national treasure. Um, they don't realize it now, but after it's gone everybody has fond memories. You can go anywhere and when you say you're from Grand Isle, somebody will invariably come to you and go, Grand Isle, oh! I know that - I was in Venice Italy about three years ago on the Rialto Bridge, these people come walking up - we're watching this big fireworks display, and she goes, oh we're from Louisiana. And I said, oh! No, she says, where are you from? Because we were Americans obviously - I said I'm from Grand Isle. Oh darling! I'm from Baton Rouge! I mean every - oh! My daddy used to have a camp, we used to come fishing, it's, that's the way it is everywhere you go. Grand Isle has just got so many great memories for so many people. And it would just be you know, it'd just behooves us to protect it. And take care of it. So hopefully, when coastal erosion becomes a super issue and they really start looking at it, hopefully we'll be able to be one of those places along with Grand Terre, and Last Island, and you know, Terrebonne, and that way toward Mississippi. That they'll really come up with a good program to take care of it. Because places like this just don't happen quickly.

R: Yeah, I think you said it best. It's a national treasure. Well we're at the end of the tape.

G: Thank you.

R: Thank you so much.